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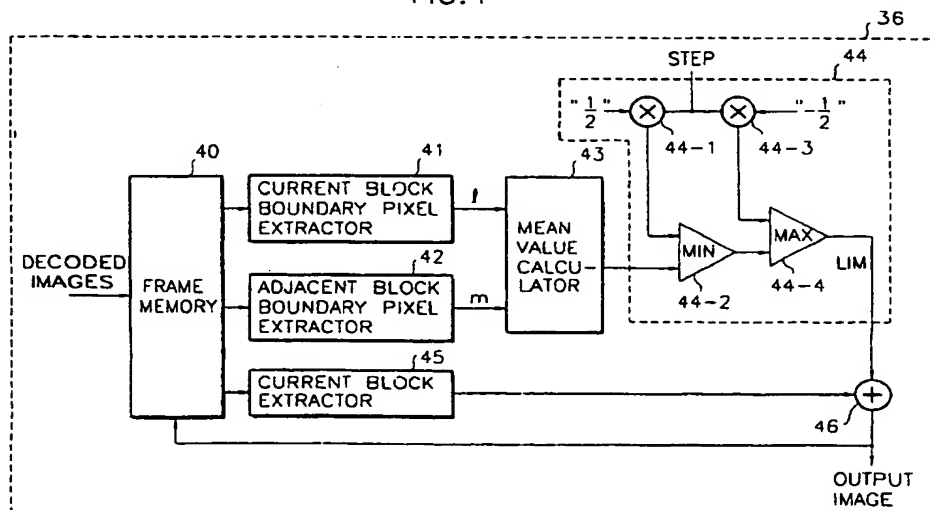
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(54) Methods and apparatus for removing blocking effect in a motion picture decoder

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FIG. 4





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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 97 30 3246

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT					
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)		
A	US 5 144 688 A (BOVIR ALAN C ET AL) * abstract * * column 3, line 58 - column 5, line 25 * ---	1-10	H04N7/30 G06T9/00		
A	US 5 367 385 A (YUAN XIANCHENG) * abstract; figures * * column 1, line 41 - column 2, line 51 * * column 5, line 61 - column 7, line 19 * * column 9, line 19 - column 10, line 42; claims * ---	1-10			
A	EP 0 502 622 A (NORTHERN TELECOM LTD) * the whole document * ---	1-10			
A	EP 0 585 573 A (IBM) * page 3, line 50 - page 4, line 14 * ---	1-10			
P,A	EP 0 723 375 A (SAMSUNG ELECTRONICS CO LTD) * abstract * * page 4, line 38 - page 6, line 18 * ---	1-10			
P,A	EP 0 771 116 A (TOKYO SHIBAURA ELECTRIC CO) * abstract * * page 3, line 13 - page 4, line 56 * -----	1-10	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>H04N G06T</td> </tr> </table>	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)	H04N G06T
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims					
Place of search BERLIN		Date of completion of the search 25 February 1998	Examiner Gries, T		
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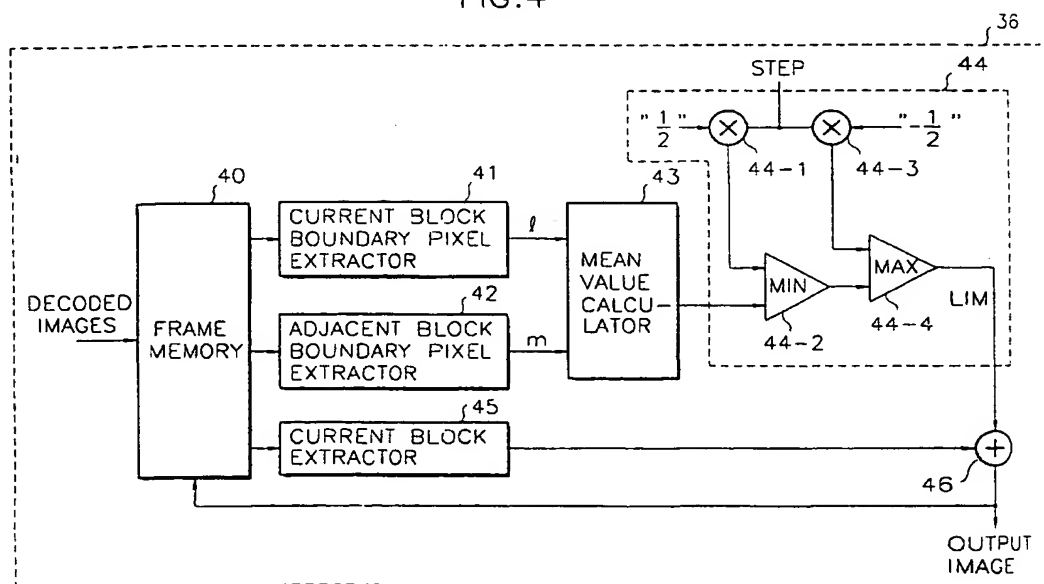
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(54) **Methods and apparatus for removing blocking effect in a motion picture decoder**

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FIG. 4



Description

The present invention relates to methods and apparatuses for removing blocking effect caused by quantization error in a motion picture decoder.

In general, the amount of data associated with visual information is so large that its storage would require enormous storage capacity. Although the capacities of utilizing several storage media are substantial, the access speeds are usually inversely proportional to the capacity. Storage and transmission of such data require large capacity and bandwidth. To eliminate the need for large storage capacity, there is an image data compression technique, which reduces the number of bits required to store or transmit image without any appreciable loss of data.

The image data compression removes redundancies contained in image signals. The redundancies comprises a spectral redundancy among colors, a temporal redundancy between successive screens, a spatial redundancy between adjacent pixels within the screen, and a statistical redundancy. Here, a method of image coding for removing the spatial redundancy is transform coding, which divides original input images into small size blocks and processes them individually.

In the transmitter, each blocks of original image is converted by the transform coding and transform coefficients are generated. The transform coefficients are quantized and transmitted to the receiver. In the receiver, the transform coefficients are inverse quantized and converted so that each blocks of original image is regenerated.

Fig. 1 shows a block diagram of a conventional digital motion picture coder/decoder, which is widely used in image processing system such as a High Definition Television (HDTV).

In Fig. 1, the motion picture coder comprises a differential image generator (DIG), a discrete cosine transform unit (DCT unit), a quantizer (Q), a variable length coding unit (VLC unit), an inverse quantizer (IQ), an inverse discrete cosine transform unit (IDCT unit), an adder (ADD), a frame memory, a motion estimator, and a motion compensator.

In DIG, a current image and a predicted image are inputted, and a differential image is generated. The generated differential image is outputted to the DCT unit to be divided into blocks. The DCT unit processes every block into DCT coefficients. The DCT coefficients are then quantized according to a quantization step size in the quantizer. The quantized coefficients are coded according to the Huffman Table in the VLC unit. The quantized coded coefficients are then transmitted to the channel.

The predicted image inputted to the DIG is obtained as following. First, quantized DCT coefficients from the quantizer are quantized inversely in the inverse quantizer. The inverse quantized DCT coefficients are converted to image data in the IDCT. The converted image data are inputted to the adder. In the adder, original images are regenerated by using the transformed image data and previous image data from the motion compensator. The regenerated images from the adder are stored in the frame memory. From the frame memory, the previous images are outputted by delaying them in frame units. In the motion estimator, the previous image signals from the frame memory and the current image signals are compared for difference between the two frames, and a motion vector is generated. In the motion compensator, the predicted image having a pixel value similar to the current frame is outputted by shifting the previous image signal outputted from the frame memory as much as the motion vector.

In the motion picture coder like the above, intra-mode frames are coded and transmitted. However, in the case of inter-mode frames, differential signals obtained through the motion estimation and the motion compensation should be coded and transmitted in order to decrease the transmission rate. To solve the above problem, a switch is disposed between the DIG and the motion compensator. Accordingly, the switch is opened when the intra-frames are inputted, and the switch is closed when the inter-frames are inputted.

The motion picture decoder comprises a variable length decoding unit (VLD unit), an inverse quantizer, an inverse discrete cosine transform unit (IDCT unit), an adder, a frame memory, and a motion compensator.

In the motion picture decoder, the input image signals are decoded by the VLD unit. The decoded signals are then quantized inversely by the inverse quantizer. The inverse quantized image data are converted inversely by the IDCT unit to be outputted to the adder. The image data from the adder are stored and delayed in the frame memory. The consequent stored delayed data from the frame memory are outputted to the motion compensator in order to be compensated with reference to the previous images. The compensated signals are then outputted to the adder.

The intra-mode frames and inter-mode frames are regenerated according to the switch disposed between the adder and motion compensator. Namely, in case of the intra-mode frames, the output data from the IDCT unit are directly outputted to the adder. However, in case of the inter-mode frames, the output data from the IDCT are added to the previous image data from the motion compensator and the resulting data are transmitted to the adder to regenerate a current image signal.

In the decoded digital images like the above, blocking effect occurs near to discontinuous boundary between blocks. The occurrence of this blocking effect is generated during the transform coding process of the divided blocks of digital images. Further, when the quantization step size is expanded during quantization, the quantization error increases and the blocking effect in the discontinuous boundary between blocks becomes even more apparent.

In view of the foregoing, it is an object of the present invention to provide methods and apparatuses for removing

blocking effect due to a quantization error in a motion picture decoder having loss to the original image data.

In order to achieve the above object, the present invention provides a method for removing blocking effect in a motion picture decoder comprising the steps of extracting boundary pixel values of a current block; extracting boundary pixel values of each adjacent block; extracting difference values between boundary pixel values of the current block and boundary pixel values of each adjacent block; calculating the mean value for the difference values; limiting the mean value between $-\frac{1}{2}$ quantization step size and $\frac{1}{2}$ quantization step size; and adding the limited mean value to each pixel value of the current block to output an image.

In addition, an apparatus for removing blocking effect in the motion picture decoder of the present invention comprises a frame memory for simultaneously receiving and storing decoded image signals in frame units and a corrected feedback current block with removed blocking effect; a current block boundary pixel extracting means for extracting boundary pixel values of the current block of frames stored in the frame memory; an adjacent block boundary pixel extracting means for extracting boundary pixel values of adjacent blocks of frames stored in the frame memory; a mean value calculating means for calculating difference values between boundary pixel values of the current block and of the adjacent blocks, and a mean value of the difference values; a mean value limiting means for limiting the mean value between $-\frac{1}{2}$ quantization step size and $\frac{1}{2}$ quantization step size, and outputting the limited mean value; a current block extracting means for extracting current block of frames stored in the frame memory and outputting pixel values of the current block; and an adding means for adding the mean value from the mean value limiting means to each pixel value of the current block from the current block extracting means, outputting the corrected current block, and feeding back the corrected current block to the frame memory.

In another aspect, the present invention provides a method for removing blocking effect in a motion picture decoder comprising steps of extracting boundary pixel values within a current block and each adjacent block; calculating absolute values for difference values between boundary pixel values of the current block and boundary pixel values of each adjacent block; detecting whether a boundary of the current block is an edge or not, by comparing the difference values, the absolute values, and a threshold level to each other; and extracting corrected pixel values by filtering one pixel value of boundary pixels of the current block and a plurality of upper and lower pixels referencing the boundary pixel of the current block as a center if the boundary pixel values of the current block is uniform (not an edge), otherwise extracting directly boundary pixel values of the current block if the boundary pixel values of the current block is not uniform (an edge).

In still another aspect, the present invention provides an apparatus for removing blocking effect comprising a frame memory for receiving and storing decoded image signals in frame units and a corrected feedback current block with removed blocking effect; a current block boundary pixel extracting means for extracting sequentially boundary pixel values of the current block stored in the frame memory; an adjacent block boundary extracting means for extracting sequentially boundary pixel values of adjacent blocks stored in the frame memory; an edge detecting means for outputting a first selection signal if the boundary pixel values of the current block are not an edge, whereas outputting a second selection signal if the boundary pixel values of the current block are an edge after receiving pixel values of the current block and boundary pixel values of an adjacent block; an input pixel extracting means for outputting in parallel a boundary pixel value of the current block and a plurality of upper and lower pixel values referencing the boundary pixel value of current block as a center in accordance with an output order of boundary pixel values of the current block from the frame memory; a selecting means for inputting pixel values from the input pixel extracting means to a boundary pixel filtering means according to the first selection signal, and inputting directly pixel values from the input pixel extracting means to the frame memory according to the second selection signal; and a boundary pixel filtering means for feeding back corrected boundary pixel values to the frame memory by filtering the output pixel values from the selecting means.

The above and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a conventional motion picture coder and decoder;

Figs. 2A to 2D are views illustrating loss of an information due to a quantization error;

Fig. 3 is a block diagram illustrating a motion picture decoder comprising an apparatus for removing blocking effect in accordance with the present invention;

Fig. 4 is a block diagram illustrating an apparatus for removing blocking effect in accordance with a first preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 5 is a view illustrating transformed 8×8 pixels of current block and upper, lower, left, right adjacent blocks;

Fig. 6 is a block diagram illustrating an apparatus for removing blocking effect in accordance with a second preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

Fig. 7 is a view illustrating a plurality of pixel extracted from boundary pixels of a current block for describing an operation of an input pixel extractor in Fig. 6.

Reference will now be made in detail to the present invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts.

Figs. 2A to 2D show a process of an information loss due to a quantization error. When a DCT coefficient is quantized according to a quantization step size, the quantized DCT coefficient is expressed by $QF = \left[\frac{F}{\text{step}} + \frac{1}{2} \right] \left(\left[\right] \right)$ (Gaussian symbol). For example, in Fig. 2B, the quantized DCT coefficient value is $QF=1$, if the range of the DCT coefficient F is $\frac{1}{2} \times \text{step} \leq F < \frac{3}{2} \times \text{step}$. As shown in Fig. 2D, the inversely quantized coefficient value F' is determined by expression $F'=1 \times \text{step}$ when the above quantized coefficient value $QF=1$ is quantized inversely. Accordingly, the difference $|F-F'|$ between the original DCT coefficient value F and the inversely quantized DCT coefficient F' may be $\frac{1}{2} \times \text{step}$ at its maximum. Namely, the quantization error that which cause the blocking effect in the digital image falls within $0 \leq |F-F'| \leq \frac{1}{2} \times \text{step}$.

Fig. 3 shows a motion picture decoder comprising an apparatus for removing blocking effect 36 of the present invention, which is connected to an end portion of the decoder in Fig. 1. Decoded image signals and a quantized step size information are inputted into the apparatus for removing blocking effect 36 such that blocking effects in the image signals are removed and the corrected image signals are outputted.

Fig. 4 shows a first embodiment of the apparatus for removing blocking effect 36. The apparatus for removing blocking effect 36 comprises a frame memory 40; a current block boundary pixel extractor 41; an adjacent block boundary pixel extractor 42; a mean value calculator 43; a mean value limiter 44; a current block extractor 45; and an adder 46. The mean value limiter 44 comprises a multiply 44-1 for multiplying quantized step size by $\frac{1}{2}$; a selector 44-2 for selecting and outputting a minimum MIN; a multiply 44-3 for multiplying the quantized step size by $-\frac{1}{2}$ and a selector 44-4 for selecting and outputting a maximum MAX.

Fig. 5 shows 8×8 pixel current block, adjacent upper, lower, left, and right blocks and boundary pixels between each block. Here, the current block for removal of blocking effect is illustrated. The boundary pixels a_0-a_7 of the current block correspond to the boundary pixels A_0-A_7 of the upper adjacent block A. The boundary pixels b_0-b_7 of the current block correspond to the boundary pixels B_0-B_7 of the left adjacent block B. The boundary pixels c_0-c_7 of the current block correspond to the boundary pixels C_0-C_7 of the lower adjacent block C. The boundary pixels d_0-d_7 of the current block correspond to the boundary pixels D_0-D_7 of the right adjacent block D.

In Fig. 4, the decoded image signals are inputted and stored in the frame memory 40 in frame units. In the current block boundary pixel extractor 41, boundary pixels values ℓ of the current block, which lies between the current block and the adjacent blocks are extracted from the frame memory 40. Namely, 32 boundary pixel values a_0-a_7 , b_0-b_7 , c_0-c_7 , d_0-d_7 are outputted sequentially from the current block boundary pixel extractor 41.

In addition, by the adjacent block boundary pixel extractor 42, boundary pixels values m of the adjacent blocks, which lies between the current block and the adjacent blocks are extracted from the frame memory 40. Namely, 32 boundary pixel values A_0-A_7 , B_0-B_7 , C_0-C_7 , D_0-D_7 are outputted sequentially from the adjacent block boundary pixel extractor 42.

In the mean value calculator 43, the pixel values ℓ of the current block and the pixel values m of the adjacent blocks are sequentially inputted. Each difference value $\ell-m$ between the inputted pixel values is calculated by the mean value calculator 43. Further, a mean value for each difference value is calculated and outputted from the mean value calculator 43. The mean value is obtained by the following expression.

Equation 1.

$$M = \frac{1}{32} \left[\sum_{i=0}^7 (\ell_i - m_i) \right]$$

$$= \frac{1}{32} \left[\sum_{i=0}^7 (a_i - A_i) + \sum_{i=0}^7 (b_i - B_i) + \sum_{i=0}^7 (c_i - C_i) + \sum_{i=0}^7 (d_i - D_i) \right]$$

The above equation 1 is applied when there are 4 adjacent blocks. However, when there are 2 or 3 adjacent blocks, the mean value is obtained by dividing all the added boundary pixel values by 24 or 16 respectively.

In the mean value limiter 44, the mean value and a quantization step size are inputted. The inputted mean value is limited between the minimum $-\frac{1}{2} \times \text{step}$ and maximum $\frac{1}{2} \times \text{step}$ by the mean value limiter 44, and the limited mean value LIM is outputted. Namely, in the minimum selector 44-2, the mean value is compared to maximum $\frac{1}{2} \times \text{step}$ to select a smaller value. In the maximum selector 44-4, the smaller value obtained from the minimum selector 44-2 is

compared to the minimum $-\frac{1}{2} \times$ step to select a bigger value. The limited mean value LIM from the maximum selector 44-4 is outputted to the adder 46.

In the current block extractor 45, the current block is extracted from the frame memory 40. 64 pixel values of the extracted current block are sequentially outputted to the adder 46.

In the adder 46, the limited mean value LIM from the mean value limiter 44 is added to each pixel value of the current block outputted from the current block extractor 45. The added and corrected current block is inputted into a display processor (not shown). In addition, the corrected current block is fed back to the frame memory 40. In the frame memory 40, the stored current block is replaced with the corrected current block from the adder 46. This corrected current block is used for removal of blocking effect in the next block.

Another method for calculating the mean value utilizes a threshold level TH. TH prevents a damage in edges of original image during the removal process of blocking effect. To obtain the mean value M, the threshold level is determined and an absolute value from the difference value between boundary pixels smaller than the threshold value is selected. For example, when a 256 level image is coded/decoded, the threshold value is obtained as the following. A range of quantization error falls within -4 to 4 when the quantization step size 8 is utilized, and a range of the absolute difference between boundaries of blocks can be predicted to be 0 to 8. Further, a mean absolute difference between the block boundary is determined to be 4 if the quantization error is an uniform distribution. Accordingly, the threshold level greater than 4 is selected since the threshold value must be greater than the differences of the boundary pixel values. Namely, when the determined threshold level is 4 and the absolute value $| \ell_i - m_i |$ of differences between the boundary pixel values of less than or equal to 4 is selected to yield a mean value M. At this time, the mean value M is obtained by the following expression.

Equation 2.

$$\text{if } (| \ell_i - m_i | \leq \text{TH}) \{ S = S + (\ell_i - m_i) \quad C = C + 1 \}$$

$$M = \frac{S}{C}$$

(S and C are initialized to 0 at each block)

The obtained mean value is inputted into the mean value limiter 44 for limiting the mean value within the range of quantization error.

Fig. 6 shows a second embodiment of the apparatus for removing blocking effect. When there is a drastic difference between the boundary pixel values of the current block and the boundary pixel values of the adjacent blocks, the difference is attributed by either quantization error, which is occurred during transform coding or non-uniform (containing edge) current block. It is not desirable to indiscriminately utilize blocking effect removal process in existence of this difference, since the current block containing an edge would be distorted by the process. The second embodiment of the apparatus for removing blocking effect provides system for differentiating non-uniform block from uniform block to selectively remove blocking effect caused by the quantization error. The apparatus for blocking effect comprises a frame memory 60, a current block boundary pixel extractor 61, an adjacent block boundary pixel extractor 62, an edge detector 63, a boundary pixel extractor 64, a selector 65, and a boundary pixel filter 66.

In the frame memory 60, the decoded image signals are stored in frame units. The stored pixel values in the frame memory 60 are corrected by boundary pixel values of the feedback current block. When corresponding blocks are corrected, the corrected frame is outputted from the frame memory 60 to a display processor (not shown).

A role and an operation of the current block boundary pixel extractor 61 and the adjacent block boundary pixel extractor 62 are same as the current block boundary pixel extractor 41 and the adjacent block boundary pixel extractor 42 of the first preferred embodiment.

In the edge detector 63, boundary pixel values ℓ of the current block boundary and boundary pixel values m of adjacent blocks are inputted. According to the quantization step size, a first selection signal is outputted if the boundary of the current block is uniform (not an edge), whereas a second selection signal is outputted if the boundary of the current block is not uniform (an edge). After extracting absolute difference values between the boundary pixel values of the current block and the boundary pixel values of the adjacent blocks, an edge is detected by the edge detector 63, if all the absolute difference values are less than equal to the threshold level, the edge detector 63 determines that the current block is uniform (edge free) and the removal of the blocking effect is needed. If the absolute difference value is greater than the threshold value, the current block is determined to be non-uniform (containing edge) and the removal of the blocking effect is not needed.

For example, as in Fig. 3, consider that there are 4 adjacent blocks to the current block and the threshold level is 4. In the edge detector 63, 32 boundary pixel values $\ell_i, a_0-a_7, b_0-b_7, c_0-c_7, d_0-d_7$ are inputted sequentially from the current block boundary pixel extractor 61. In addition, in the edge detector 63, 32 boundary pixel values $m_i, A-A_7,$

g) a boundary pixel filtering means for filtering pixel values from said selecting means and feeding back corrected boundary pixel values to said frame memory.

- 5 9. The apparatus for removing blocking effect in a motion picture decoder of claim 8, wherein said edge detecting means comprises:

a subtracting means for calculating difference values between boundary pixel values of said current block and said adjacent blocks;

10 an absolute value calculating means for calculating absolute values for the difference values; and

a selection signal generating means for outputting a first selection signal if all absolute difference values are less than or equal to a threshold level, whereas outputting a second selection signal if any of all absolute difference values is more than the threshold level, by comparing the absolute difference values and a threshold level.

- 15 10. The apparatus for removing blocking effect in a motion picture decoder of claim 8, wherein said boundary pixel filtering means is a low pass filter.

FIG. 1 (PRIOR ART)

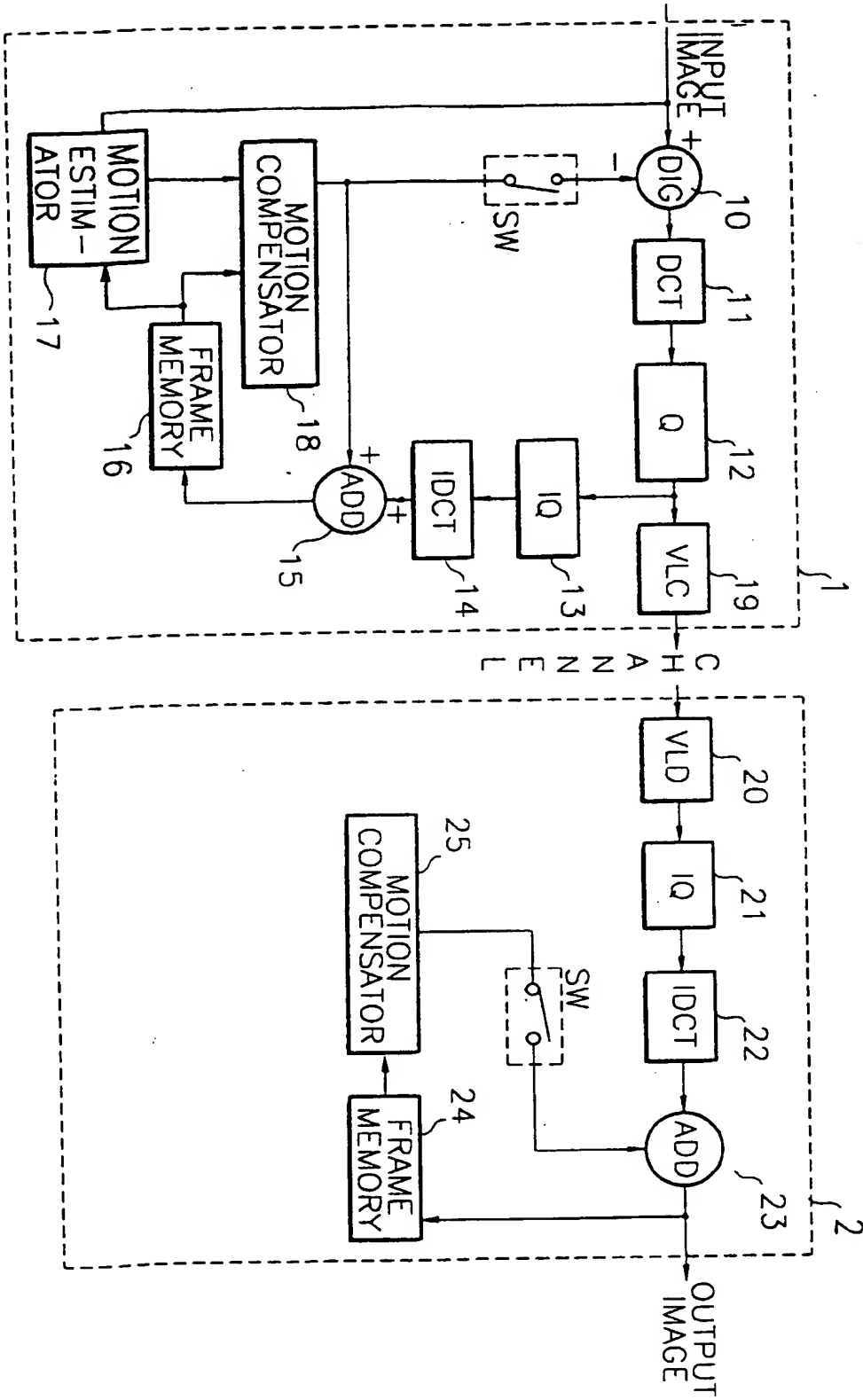


FIG.2A

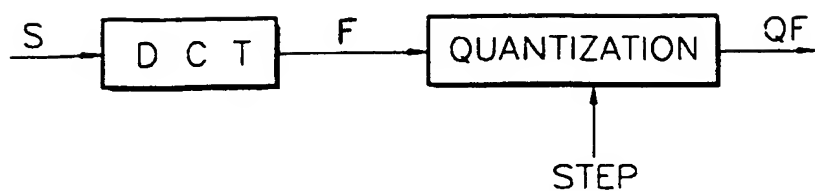


FIG.2B

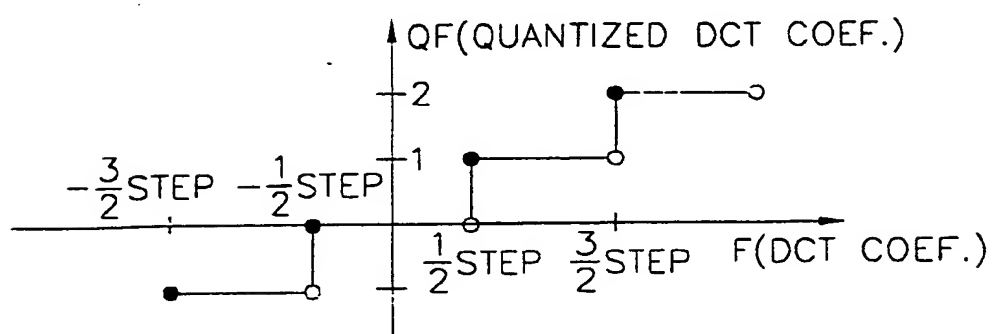


FIG.2C

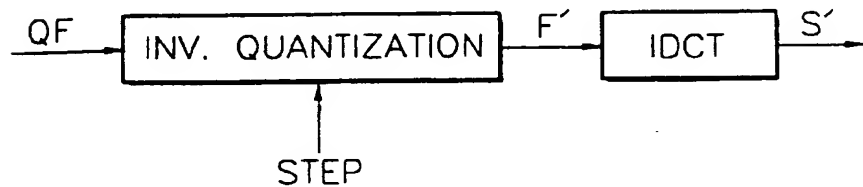
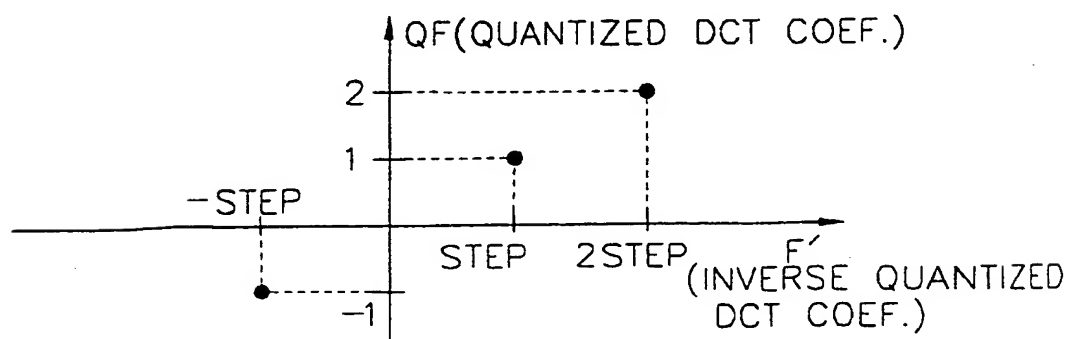


FIG.2D



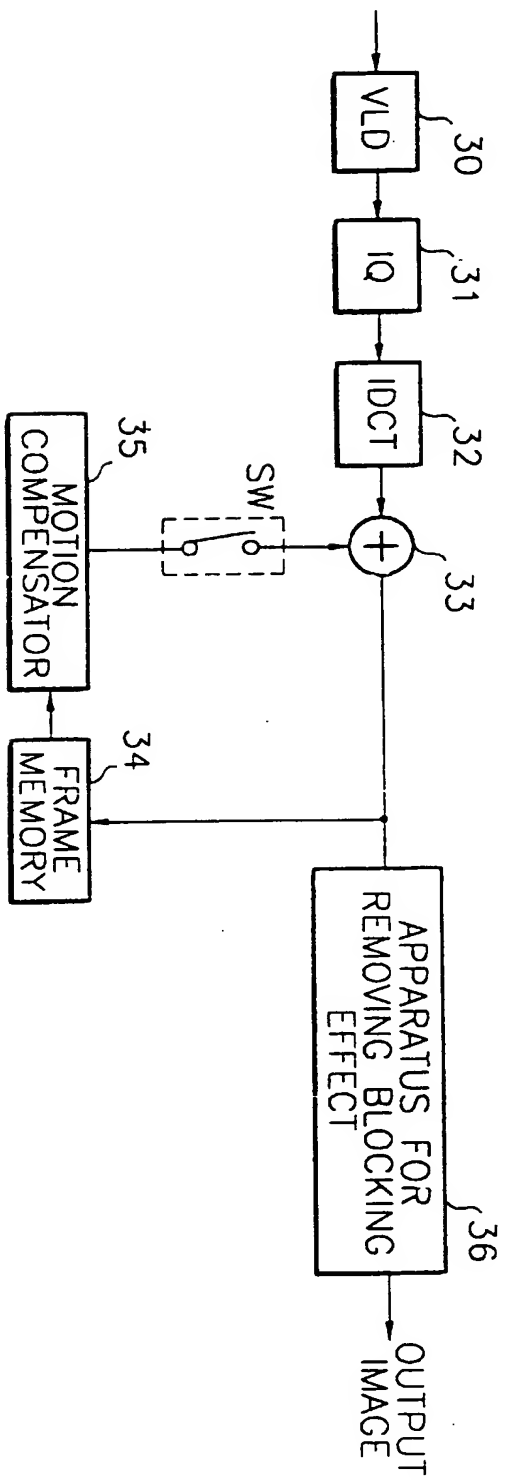


FIG. 3

FIG. 4

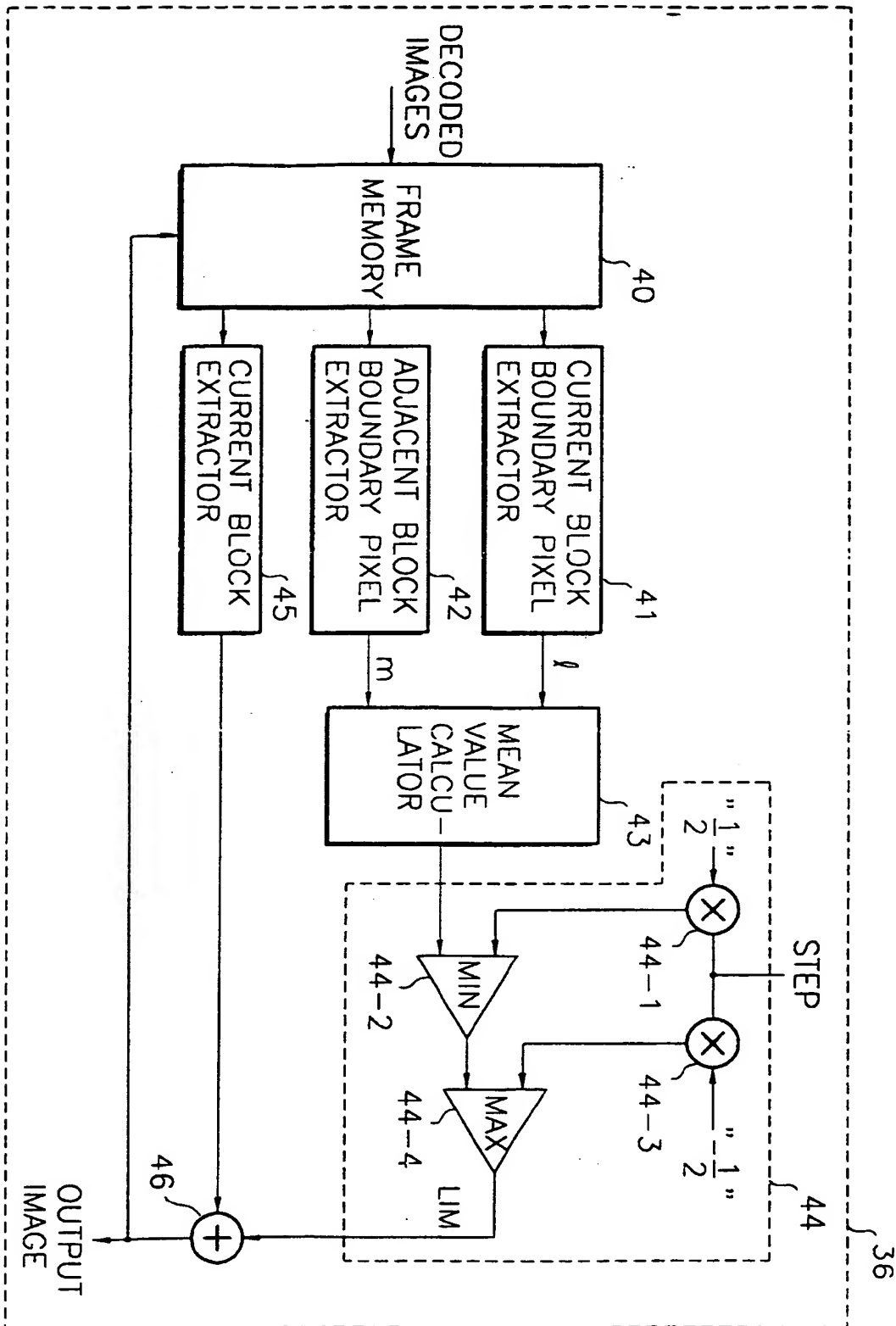
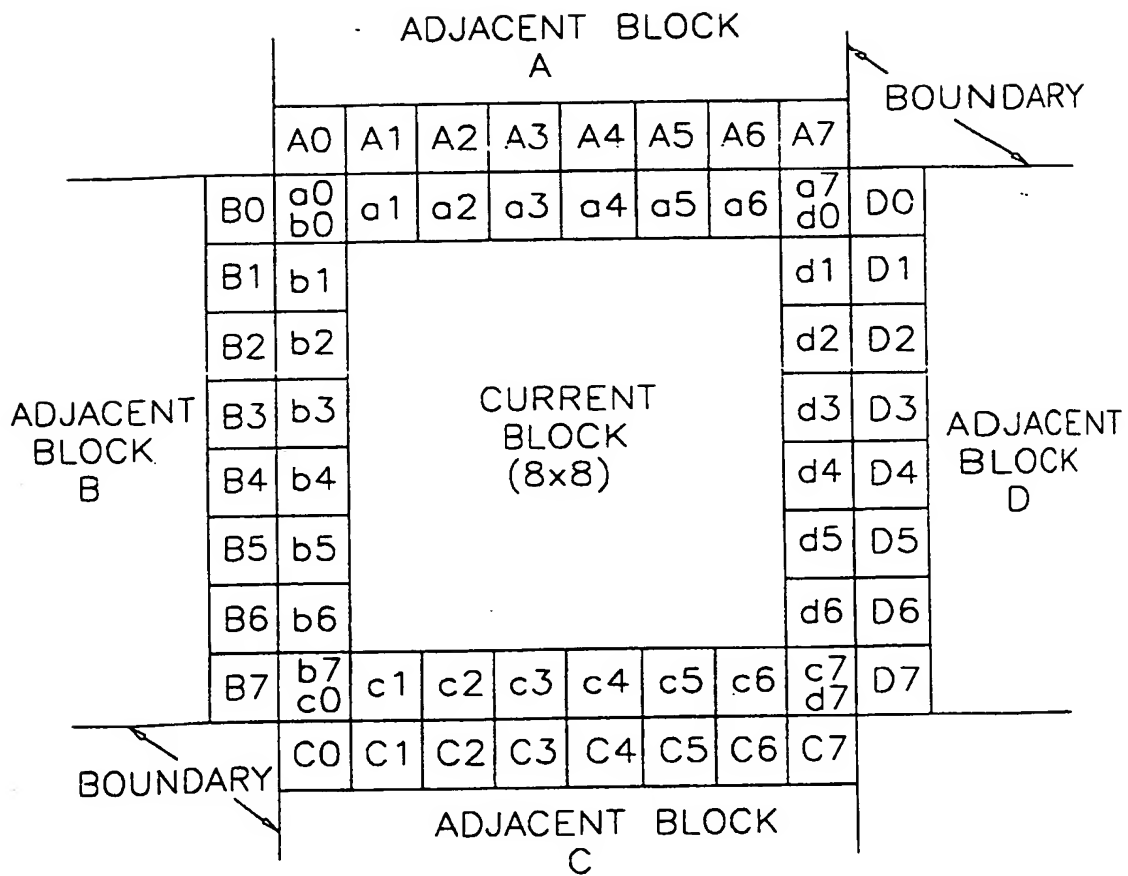


FIG.5



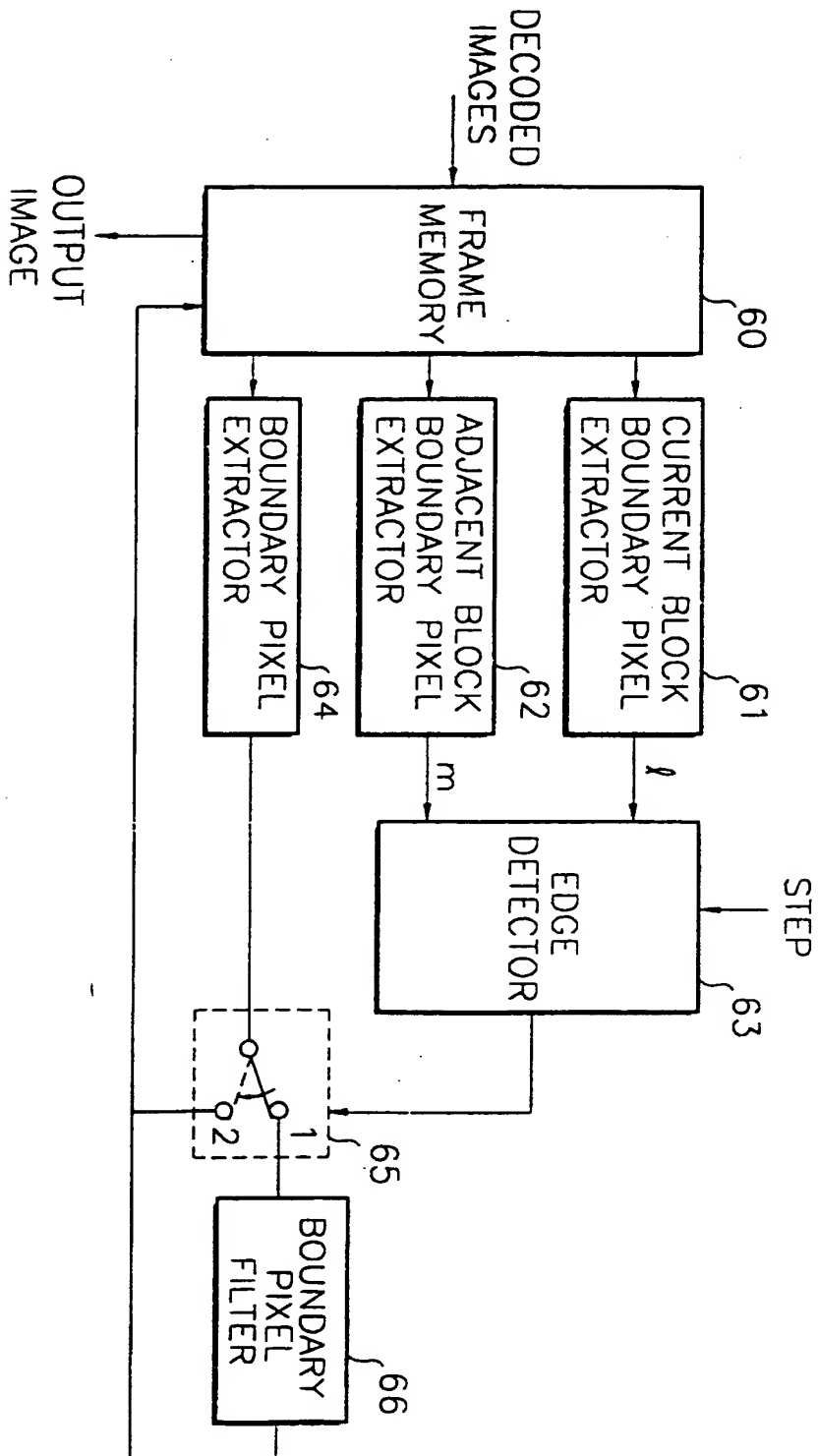
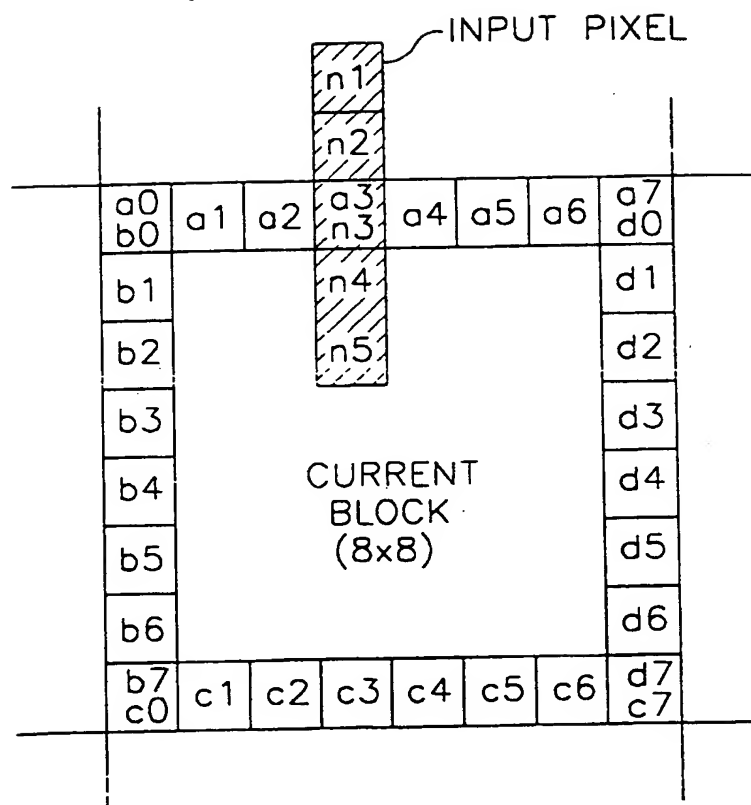


FIG. 6

FIG. 7



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